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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5358
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2994
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1259
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1228
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2193
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3966
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 4880
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2458
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 3033
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 2942
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001686

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: WEST KALIMANTAN -- ETHNIC TENSIONS ON THE DECREASE

REF: A. 07 JAKARTA 3259
[1](#)B. 07 JAKARTA 2732

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Pol/C recently visited West Kalimantan Province in Indonesian Borneo. In a September 4 meeting, Dr. Cornelis--who took over as governor earlier this year--underscored his priorities which include improving infrastructure in the region and educational opportunities, especially for the indigenous Dayak community.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY (Con'd): Contacts reported that inter-ethnic tensions in the region were on the decrease. They attributed this to the fact that the Dayak community was happy that one of their own--Cornelis--was serving as governor. Pol/C also spoke at a local university about the U.S. elections. Overall, the new governor seems to have a firm grip on the situation, but ethnic tensions--while improved--still bear close monitoring. END SUMMARY.

MEETING THE NEW GOVERNOR

[1](#)3. (C) Pol/C and Pol FSN visited Pontianak, the capital of West Kalimantan Province in central Indonesia, September 4-5. On September 4, the U.S. team met with the Governor of West Kalimantan, Dr. Cornelis, MH. Cornelis took over as governor in early 2008 after his victory in the November 2007 gubernatorial race (see Ref A). The Governor, a member of the indigenous Dayak community and a former civil servant, spoke in Bahasa Indonesia, noting that his English language skills were weak. He told Pol/C that his major priority was education, especially for the province's Dayak community. Many members of the Dayak community lived in rural areas where there were few educational opportunities, he said. Another priority was infrastructure. The province had vast jungles and was intersected by many rivers and streams, which made travel difficult. "Roads need to be paved and bridges built," said Cornelis.

¶4. (C) Cornelis was clearly very proud of his Dayak ethnicity and of being Christian. The meeting room at his official residence was decorated with Dayak-made handicrafts. It also contained pictures of Pope Benedict XVI and the Virgin Mary plus a large crucifix. Cornelis freely smoked, ate and drank throughout the meeting, although it was Ramadhan and most Indonesians in this Muslim-dominated nation are fasting. Noting the presence of several advisers, he remarked: "They are all Muslim and know that as a Christian I won't be fasting with them."

ETHNIC SITUATION SAID TO IMPROVE

¶5. (C) Governor Cornelis told Pol/C that the ethnic situation in the province was "more positive than before." (Note: West Kalimantan's roughly five million inhabitants are deeply divided: roughly 40% are Dayak; 40% are Muslim; and 20% are members of other communities, such as those with Chinese heritage.) Cornelis said he did his best to ensure that leaders of all communities met regularly in order to discuss any issues that might pose problems.

¶6. (C) Other contacts agreed with the Governor's assessment. Pol/C and Pol FSN met with a group of Muslim leaders who said that tensions were on the decrease. Haji Abang Imim Toha, the Chair of the West Kalimantan Malay Cultural Council, related that there had been no recent incidents of serious tensions between Muslims and Dayaks. (Note: These two communities do not get along. In various incidents, the most recent in 2001, Dayak mobs--angered about migration to the region--killed hundreds of Muslim settlers.)

¶7. (C) Contacts in the Chinese community were also pleased

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with the situation. They noted that their community maintained "an informal alliance" with the Dayaks, commenting that Chinese votes had played an important role in Cornelis' triumph over a Muslim candidate in last year's gubernatorial election. Echoing comments from others, Alex Hasim, a member of the local Chinese social and cultural foundation, told Pol/C that ethnic tensions had improved largely because the Dayak community was happy with the fact that one of their own--Cornelis--was serving as governor. Continuing, Hasim said Governor Cornelis was considered "a tough Dayak," who "had a great deal of support in his community and would take on anyone if challenged."

PUBLIC OUTREACH TO STUDENTS

¶8. (U) Pol/C also spoke at Tanjung Pura University, a public institution. About 80 students and faculty participated in the event. Pol/C's PowerPoint presentation focused on the U.S. presidential election, noting that House, Senate, gubernatorial and other races will also be held in 2008. He also discussed the role of the political conventions and the general election campaign, culminating in the election on November 4. Queried by students, Pol/C also spent some time discussing the Electoral College and how it works.

STILL A TENSE REGION

¶9. (C) Over all, although the situation seems to have improved since Pol/C's last visit in late 2007 (see Ref B), inter-ethnic tensions in West Kalimantan still need to be closely monitored. Governor Cornelis appears to have a firm grip on the situation and to be working to encourage good communal relations.

¶10. (C) That said, Cornelis himself is considered a bit hard-edged and pro-Dayak, and it is not clear whether he is respected so much as feared, especially in the Muslim community. The Pontianak mayoral election slated to take place later this year will be interesting as it will involve separate Chinese and Muslim tickets, which could spark ethnic problems. (Note: Few Dayaks live in Pontianak and they

apparently will not be fielding a candidate.)

HUME